

Forward from *Baldessin & Friends* - A commemorative folio

George Baldessin and I took possession of 13 scrubby acres in St Andrews in 1970, a year before our wedding. From the beginning, the studio was George's dream. It was all important to him, given priority over the house, which was not finished until after his death. It was vital to him that his studio should look good, and was solidly built, in the European way. He insisted on bluestone, even though it was devilishly difficult to handle, and added the stained glass door as a flourish. Friends, artists and neighbours helped to build the studio and establish the property. 'Captain George', or 'GB' was our fearless leader. During the 1970s the studio was alive with a passing parade of friends and artists including Fred Williams, Jan Senbergs, Jock Clutterbuck, Les Kossatz, Roger Kemp, Paul Partos and John Perceval, just to name a few. Tragically in 1978 George's sudden death put a halt to all of this and we mourned the loss of a great friend, husband, father and artist.

Anyone who knew George could attest to his humanity, generosity and sense of community.

His life as an artist speaks to us through the quite remarkable body of work he left behind, and his life as a human being is remembered by those he helped, inspired, challenged, intrigued and taught. His dedication to, and total immersion in, his art contrasted with his ability and desire to stop and offer assistance and help where needed.

After many years overseas I returned to Australia in 2000 and conceived the idea of the studio becoming a place open to artists and creatives so George's spirit and studio could live again.

To my great pleasure this became a reality in 2001 when The Baldessin Press & Studio was founded as a not-for-profit organisation with the assistance of Doug Hails soon to be joined by Silvi Glattauer and Robert Hails. Our philosophy and vision for the Studio has always been guided by George's oft proclaimed, 'Give them a go', meaning in essence that to facilitate and encourage is the greatest gift one can give a creative person.

For over fifteen years the studio has continue to grow and flourish. From humble beginnings with a single workshop we now run a year-long program of workshops, classes, special events and residencies. And all this has been done through the hard work of our voluntary board members and numerous volunteers.

We have set a solid foundation in place and now look to the future for how we can continue to serve the printmaking and artistic community. Our vision is for the studio to be accessible to a great number of artists, offering a creative place where tranquillity and stimulation ignite. We hope to offer further residencies and retreats, particularly for those who might need it most.

With this intent and aim in mind, we conceived the idea of a commemorative folio, both as a fundraising initiative and as a way to honour George's memory. Seven artist friends - Rick Amor, G.W. Bot, Jock Clutterbuck, Michael Leunig, Imants Tillers and John Wolseley - were invited and all enthusiastically agreed to participate in the creation of the *Baldessin & Friends* folio. Each artist has donated an artwork in homage to the work and life of George Baldessin, so a future generation of artists can benefit from the use of his studio.

This folio of eight prints, is a unique coming together of seven very different artists—each highly acclaimed in their own right—who are connected by their relationship to the missing eighth member, Baldessin. It has been a moving experience for us to work with each artist and hear their memories. Each story is different but the common thread is one of respect and indeed love for their friend George. All of the artists have gone out of their way to fit this project into their busy schedule, to be interviewed and filmed, as well as produce the print.

Their generosity in this instance is carrying on the 'spirit of George' as we all recognised during the process of creating the prints; the community of artists is still alive and well.

The Press engaged Melbourne master printmaker Deanna Hitti to print the majority of the folio in George's studio. Her professionalism, artistic sensibility and dedication to this project have made a significant contribution to the success of the folio.

All proceeds from the sale of the folio go directly to The Baldessin Press & Studio, allowing us to continue to open the property for creative use as well as enabling the Press to offer an expanded program of residencies (in partnership with local, regional and international artists and galleries), workshops, master classes, events and improved studio access.

The studio itself has a huge personality, we like to think it is George's, embedded in those stones. Perhaps he is watching over us benignly while we ink up on his old litho stone using his precious rollers, and printing on the etching press he made with Enjay in 1974. It has certainly felt that way as we have all come together as old friends to work on this commemorative folio.

My sincere personal thanks go to the mighty Baldessin Press & Studio team; Silvi Glattauer, Robert Hails, Lloyd Godman and Nicole Bowler. More like a family than a team, we all recognise that hard work, perseverance and dedication to our ideals and our history come together to be something bigger than the sum of us. We look forward to a healthy continuation of our programs, with laughter, commitment and creativity in abundance. More happy times with happy artists, busy in the studio making prints, will bring joy to the world!

Tess Edwards Baldessin